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Guatemalan Defense Minister: Pre-electoral Disputes Responsible For Tensions, Violence

by Deborah Tyroler

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In statements before the National Reconciliation Commission on Aug. 23, Defense Ministry Gen. Hector Alejandro Gramajo said tensions were high in Guatemala because of disputes among candidates and their followers related to the upcoming elections. Gramajo was referring to strikes by public employees, a wave of bombings and bomb scares, and a rash of telephoned death threats. Gramajo dismission the notion that the bombings were connected with the strikes. However, he said, "radical groups" had taken advantage of the strikes which concluded last week "to enhance perceptions of destabilization affecting the country." The general acknowledged an increase in the traffic of arms and other military materiel in Guatemala. Explosives brought into Guatemala, mainly through the border areas with Honduras and El Salvador, said Gramajo, are easily obtainable, "even in butcher shops." Interior Minister Roberto Valle Valdiza said that the large quantity of explosives circulating in Guatemala could be one of the results of the upcoming Nicaraguan contra demobilization. (Basic data from Notimex, 08/23/89)

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